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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001339

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: As Tigers continue their review, government's proposal for north/east garners mixed reaction in south

Refs: Colombo 1330, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge'd'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

SUMMARY

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[¶1.](#) (C) The Tigers continue to study the GSL's proposal for establishing an interim structure in the north/east. In the south, however, the proposal has garnered a mixed reaction. The president continues to review the proposal, for example, while the radical JVP party has harshly criticized it. Muslims have also expressed concerns. In other news, there are still no firm signs that the Tigers plan to vacate an unauthorized camp in the east. While the government is taking some flak re its proposal, the situation seems politically manageable for now. END SUMMARY.

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Tigers continue to study proposal
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[¶2.](#) (SBU) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization has announced that it continues to study the Sri Lankan government's proposal for establishing an interim administration in the north/east. (Note: For details of the government's proposal, which was provided to the LTTE two weeks ago by the Norwegian government facilitators, see Reftels.) In July 25 remarks, S.P. Thamilchelvam, the LTTE's political chief, told a large crowd in the eastern district of Batticaloa that the Tigers had not yet formulated their response, but were still studying the government's proposal. Quoted on the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet," Thamilchelvam said the proposal had "several shortcomings" and he noted that the LTTE was drawing up several counter-proposals for GSL review. He added: "We are prepared to recommence peace talks if the government accepts our counter-proposals." (Note: The LTTE pulled out of the talks in late April.)

[¶3.](#) (C) Queried about the LTTE's reaction, Joseph Pararajahsingham, a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP with close Tiger links, told us that he understood that the group was carefully reviewing the GSL's proposal. He confirmed news reports that the LTTE had convoked a committee of cadre with legal experience to examine the proposal. Pararajahsingham said he was not sure when the LTTE might come back with its counter-proposals, but he thought it would take some time.

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President Mum so far
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[¶4.](#) (SBU) Turning to reaction in the south, President Kumaratunga, who shares a bitter cohabitation relationship with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, has not commented publicly on the proposal as of yet. The president's office has announced, however, that she is setting up a committee made up trusted advisers to review it. Former foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has been selected to head the committee. (Note: The Charge' meets with Kadirgamar on August 1 and will ask for his views on the government's proposal.)

[¶5.](#) (C) When asked about the president's views, Harim Peiris, one of her press spokesmen, told us that she had some specific concerns regarding the proposal, but needed to study it further. Peiris was not clear as to what these concerns might be, but they are believed to revolve around the fact that the proposal would give the LTTE a dominant voice in a north/east interim governing council. (Note: In a hint that the president may be leaning against supporting the government's proposal, several outspoken members of the president's People's Alliance, "PA," party have already publicly made the charge that the GSL is being soft on the LTTE.)

16. (SBU) A public fracas has broken out concerning the status of the draft of the proposal received by the president from the GSL. When pressed by the president's supporters, the government admitted that it had inadvertently provided the president a copy of the proposal that was an old draft and not the one the Tigers' received from the Norwegian facilitators. The president's office only learned of this when the text of the actual proposal was published in local newspapers. While the differences in text were quite small, the government's apparent carelessness served to inflame cohabitation tensions.

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JVP Lashes Out

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17. (SBU) In other reaction from the south, the radical Sinhalese chauvinist Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party has come out hard against the government's proposal. In public remarks made on July 29, Tilvin Silva, the JVP General Secretary, claimed that the creation of the proposed interim administration "would divide the country forever." The proposal also showed that the government was unwilling to take a firm position against the LTTE, he said. He added that his party would oppose the proposal via a wide-ranging mobilization of its supporters in rallies and marches, etc., beginning in August.

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Muslim Concerns

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18. (C) Although at a much lower decibel level than the JVP, Muslims have also expressed concerns about the government's proposals. At a July 30 dinner, for example, Rauf Hakeem, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader and Minister of Ports, emphasized to the Charge' the need for Muslims to have a role in running the east and not be dominated by the LTTE. Hakeem underscored the suffering of Muslims during the civil war and their need for security from LTTE intimidation and attack. Hakeem also noted that he had discussed the interim administration issue with President Kumaratunga earlier that day, characterizing the meeting as "pleasant." (Note: Hakeem is a long-standing political opponent of the president.) He also provided the Charge' a document detailing Muslim concerns and counter-proposals meant to safeguard their interests. (Note: This text has been forwarded via e-mail to SA/INS.)

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No sign of change re LTTE Base

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19. (C) In other peace process news, there are still no firm signs that the Tigers plan to vacate an unauthorized military base the group has set up in the east. (Note: Per Reftels, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, "SLMM," has ruled that the establishment of the base violated the ceasefire accord.) In a July 31 conversation, Matti Kekki, an action officer in the Trincomalee office of the SLMM, confirmed that the camp was still there. Despite some indications that the Tigers' hard-line stance re holding the camp might be thawing, Hagrup Haukland, the Colombo-based deputy SLMM head of mission, told us that the monitors still had not received any sort of message from the LTTE that it planned to vacate the site anytime soon. (Note: The Norwegian government facilitators are also looking into this situation. The Charge is scheduled to meet with Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar on August 1 to review latest developments.)

10. (C/NF) Regarding the base, the Sri Lankan military publicly announced late July 30 that it had no plans to attack the LTTE base. The announcement was made to rebut some recent press reports that claimed that a military attack was imminent. In discussions with senior military officials, DATT was also told that the GSL has no plans to launch any sort of armed attack. He was informed, however, that the military, at the direction of political leaders, had been instructed to look into ways to isolate the camp, so as to make it difficult for the Tigers to hold.

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COMMENT

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11. (C) The government has received relatively positive soundings re its proposal from the LTTE so far. It appears as if the Tigers are genuinely interested in following up on the matter. Whether their initial

indication of interest will lead to a new round of peace talks soon is still up in the air, however. Regarding the south, while the government is taking some flak on its interim administration proposal, the situation seems politically manageable at this point. This is especially the case when one compares what happened in the past when similar (if somewhat more fundamental) proposals were made. In 1987, for example, the Indo-Sri Lankan accord sparked large-scale violent demonstrations in the south and President Kumaratunga's proposals for devolution in 2000 met so much resistance that they were never brought up for a vote. In that vein, the JVP seems set on trying to stir things up against the GSL. The mood of the public, which is still largely pro-peace, does not seem to offer the JVP much hope that it can gain real traction, however. END COMMENT.

112. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE